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WILLIAM M. R. FRENCH

The following tribute to William M. R. French, Director of the Art Institute of Chicago, who died on June 3 after a brief illness, is by Lorado Taft, the sculptor, and shows how deep an impression Mr. French's life has left on his adopted city. It explains the ideals which guided Mr. French and his associates in developing the Art Institute into one of the most popularly useful art museums in this country.

"In the death of Mr. French, Chicago has lost one of her most valuable citizens. For thirty-five years he held the position of Director of the Art Institute. He saw it grow from little more than an intangible idea to its present position of usefulness and honor. And through all those years the idea was never lost sight of: the Art Institute of Chicago was to be a Temple of Beauty for all the people. To-day this institution, although perhaps the third in rank from the point of view of possessions and endowment, is the most used of all museums in America. A million people entered its portals last year. Its school of three thousand pupils is famed the world over. Its halls are open to clubs and societies at all times. Its exhibitions and lectures are wide embracing and almost numberless. More and more nearly does it realize the ideal of its founders that it shall be a glorified "neighborhood center" for the entire community.

"Such an accomplishment is not the work of one man and we all know the group of citizens whom we honor in this connection, but the sympathetic, clear headed, and unwavering executive throughout these years was Mr. French. A man of great refinement and scholarship, an orator of singular ability, a famous lecturer and writer of unusual charm, an artist of enviable gift, he was above all a Christian gentleman whose genial, kindly influence penetrated every part of the great institution which he guided. Such a tribute of affection as was paid him by the Art Institute employes is as rare a recompense as life can bring.

"In his intellectual life and friendships Mr. French constantly recalled to mind that eloquent appeal of John Ruskin: "The eternal court is open to you, with its companionship wide as the world, multitudinous as its days; the chosen and the mighty of every time and place." More than any other man that I have ever known he lived in this exalted companionship. Others find more time for reading than his busy life permitted, but with him each well chosen book was a friend and a source of deep satisfaction which it was his great pleasure to share with those about him.

"People who did not know Mr. French have been surprised at the references to his humor. The fact is that no more witty man could be found in a day's journey. He was as whimsical as Eugene Field and drew upon stores of classic lore as generously. Those who heard Mr. French at the last annual dinner of the Chicago Artists will recall the inimitable perfection of his speech upon that occasion. As sparkling as the invention of one of our best professional entertainers, it was ballasted and given significance by the earnestness of the man, by a record of a life of devotion known to us all.

"To know Mr. French well was a liberal education; to have been counted among his friends will be esteemed by some of us one of the most precious of life's privileges."